

# Fetal Hemoglobin Expression in the Compound Heterozygous State for –117 (G→A) $\text{A}^\gamma$ HPFH and IVSII-745 (C→G) $\beta^+$ Thalassemia: A Case Study

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We studied a family in which two inherited defects of the non- $\alpha$ -globin cluster segregate: Greek hereditary persistence of fetal hemoglobin (HPFH) and  $\beta$ -thalassemia. The compound heterozygote is a healthy man with 43% HbF,  $\text{G}^\gamma/\text{A}^\gamma$  ratio (27:73) differing from that of 10 simple heterozygotes for the Greek HPFH (92:8), normal levels of total Hb (13.3 g/dl), and reduced HbA<sub>2</sub> levels comparing with the levels of  $\beta$ -thal heterozygotes for the same mutation. Molecular analysis of the  $\beta$ -globin genotype revealed the presence of the IVSII-745 (C→G)  $\beta^+$  RNA splice mutation in trans with the –117 G→A Greek HPFH. The  $\beta^+$  mutation was linked to haplotype VII and the Greek HPFH was associated with haplotype Ia. The father of the compound heterozygote carries the Greek HPFH in trans with the –158 C→T on the  $\text{G}^\gamma$  promoter, which is linked with haplotype IV. He presented 13.5% HbF with a  $\text{G}^\gamma/\text{A}^\gamma$  ratio 75:25. His daughter was a compound heterozygote for the IVSII-745 mutation in trans with the –158 C→T, while her HbF levels were 3.7% with a  $\text{G}^\gamma/\text{A}^\gamma$  ratio 31:69. *Am. J. Hematol.* 61:139–143, 1999. © 1999 Wiley-Liss, Inc.

**Key words:** hereditary persistence of fetal hemoglobin (HPFH); beta-globin mutation; thalassemia; haplotype; Xmn I

## INTRODUCTION

Nondeletional hereditary persistences of fetal hemoglobin (ndHPFH) are benign conditions characterized by continuing expression of fetal haemoglobin (HbF) in adulthood. Sixteen point mutations producing the nd-HPFH phenotype have been defined in the last few years by sequencing analysis. Among them 11 are identified at the  $\text{A}^\gamma$  gene promoter ( $\text{A}^\gamma$ -HPFH) and the remaining five at the  $\text{G}^\gamma$ -gene promoter ( $\text{G}^\gamma$ -HPFH) [1–2]. In the Greek type HPFH [3–6], it has been shown [7] that the (G→A) substitution at position –117 adjacent to the distal CAAT box of the  $\text{A}^\gamma$  gene promoter is responsible for the  $\text{A}^\gamma$  globin overexpression, possibly by inhibiting binding of a repressor [8]. In addition, as mentioned before [9–11], the activity of the HPFH  $\beta$ -globin gene is significantly decreased relative to normal; in fact the HPFH  $\beta$ -globin appears to be only 60–65% as active as a normal  $\beta$ -globin gene. Increased HbF levels have been associated with certain  $\beta$ -globin gene promoter mutations such as those in the proximal CACCC box [12,13], with the coinheritance of a high persistence of HbF determinant in cis to the mutated  $\beta$  gene as in the Sardinian  $\delta\beta$ -thal [14]. We

describe here a healthy Athenian adult carrying –117 (G→A) Greek HPFH and  $\beta$ -thalassemia IVSII-745 (C→G)  $\beta^+$  in trans. IVSII-745 is not a very common mutation in Greece since it accounts only for the 6.9% of the total mutations causing  $\beta$ -thalassemia [15]. It was previously demonstrated [16] that this mutation is linked only to haplotype VII  $\beta$ -thalassemia chromosomes. The C→G substitution at IVS-2 position 745 in the gene of haplotype VII generates a new CAGGT sequence that serves as a new and deleterious internal splice site in the  $\beta$ -RNA precursor [17]. It is noteworthy that  $\gamma$ -globin expression is above 40% in this hitherto undescribed genetic condition, probably reflecting intensified stimulation of the mutated  $\gamma$ -promoter.

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TABLE I. Hematological Data and Biosynthetic Findings of the Members of the Family

Subjects	Age (years)	Sex	RBC 10 <sup>9</sup> /ml	MCV fl	MCH pg	Hb g/dl	%					$\beta+\gamma/\alpha$ ratio
							HbA <sub>2</sub>	HbF	$\Delta\gamma^I$	G $\gamma$	$\Delta\gamma^T$	
I-1	59	M	4.7	79.4	24.2	11.4	1.4	13.5	75	25	0	0.85
I-2	55	F	5.6	69.7	21.8	12.4	4.6	0	0	0	0	0.41
II-1	32	M	6.2	67.4	21.5	13.3	3.7	43	73	27	0	0.68
II-2	27	F	5.5	71.3	23.1	12.2	4.9	3.7	31	69	0	0.50

TABLE II. Molecular Profile of the Members of the Family

	HPFH/ $\beta$	Haplotype	$\Delta\gamma$ promoter-4-bp del	Xmn I site
Father	-117 $\Delta\gamma$ HPFH/ $\beta^A$	IV/Ia	-/-	+/-
Mother	N1/ $\beta^0$ IVSII-745	IV/VII	-/-	-/-
Propositus	-117 $\Delta\gamma$ HPFH/ $\beta^0$ IVSII-745	VII/Ia	-/-	-/-
Sister	N1/ $\beta^0$ IVSII-745	IV/VII	-/-	+/-

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Subjects

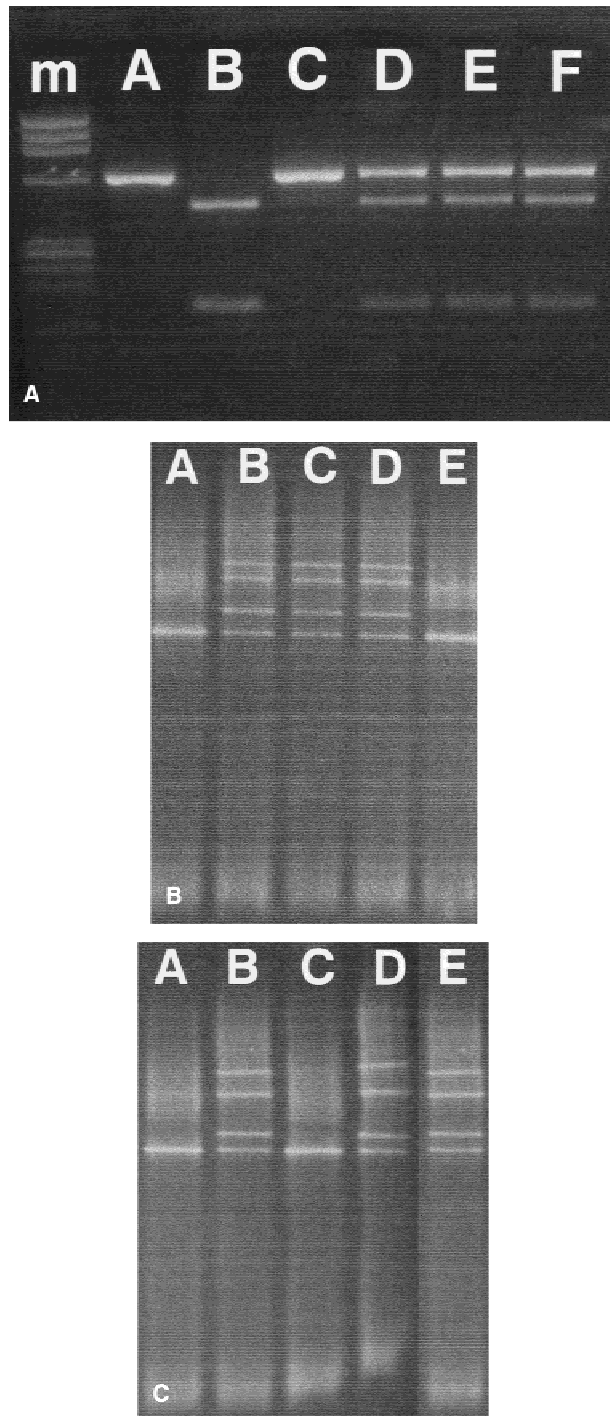
The propositus and his sister were discovered during population screening for thalassemia. When we discovered their molecular features, their parents were called for DNA analysis of the  $\beta$ -globin gene cluster. Hematological data were obtained by standard methods. In vitro globin chain synthesis was carried out on peripheral blood reticulocytes incubated with <sup>3</sup>H-leucine [18]; quantitation of HbF was done by cation-exchange high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) (Biorad/Variant<sup>TM</sup>, California, USA). The column used was a 4.6 mm interior diameter (ID) by 30 mm. HbF elutes ahead and completely separates from HbA<sub>1c</sub>. The sensitivity and accuracy of the method is 0.1% of HbF level. The G $\gamma$ ,  $\Delta\gamma^I$ , and  $\Delta\gamma^T$  were determined by the reversed-phase HPLC method, as previously described [20,21] and the column used was a 4.6 mm ID by 250 mm. DNA extraction, and Sutton's haplotype on the  $\beta$ -globin gene cluster were performed as reported for nine restriction fragment length polymorphisms (RFLPs) in the  $\beta$ -gene complex: Hinc II- $\epsilon$ , Xmn I-G $\gamma$ , Hind III-G $\gamma$ , Hind III- $\Delta\gamma$ , Hinc II- $\psi\beta$ , Hinc II-3' $\psi\beta$ , Hinf I-5' $\beta$ , Ava II- $\beta$ , RSA I-3' $\beta$  [22,23]. To determine the presence or absence of the 4-bp deletion 5' to  $\Delta\gamma$ ,  $\Delta\gamma$  promoter DNA (-622 to +53) was amplified by polymerase chain reaction (PCR) [24]. The presence of the Greek HPFH mutation was determined by the denaturing gradient gel electrophoresis technique (DGGE) as previously described [25]. The C→T mutation at position -158 of the G $\gamma$  gene promoter was studied by Xmn I digestion of DNA selectively amplified by PCR (from -623 to +28) and by DGGE analysis [25]. The presence of IVSII-745 was detected by amplification of a 577-bp fragment of DNA that includes a large part of IVS 2, exon 3, and a DNA fragment 3' to exon 3 [12]. Amplified DNA was subsequently digested

with the restriction endonuclease RSA I according to the manufacturer's guides.

## RESULTS

The hematological and biosynthetic data of the Greek family are shown in Table I. The proband (II-1), a 30-year-old man, was discovered in an ongoing thalassemia screening program; he did not show anemia or splenomegaly. There were microcytosis and hypochromia; elevated HbA<sub>2</sub> level (3.7%), though lower than the mean value (4.7%) of 32 heterozygotes carrying only the IVSII-745 mutation; and increased HbF levels (43%). MCV, MCH, and total hemoglobin (67.4, 21.5, 13.3) were not different when compared with the group of male heterozygotes for the same beta-mutation (67.2, 21, 13.2). The mean value of HbF levels from 10 individual carriers of the -117  $\Delta\gamma$ -HPFH was 13% so the proband shows a threefold increase of HbF associated with marked HbA reduction. Globin chain analysis of the HbF revealed that the proband presented different ratio of G $\gamma$ / $\Delta\gamma$  (27:73) from that measured (92:8) in 10 simple -117 HPFH heterozygotes. As red cell indices in the proband indicate a thalassemia heterozygote, we performed in vitro hemoglobin synthesis, which showed a significant reduction of  $\beta$ -globin chain production ( $\beta/\alpha$  ratio 0.41) partially ameliorated by the high production of HbF (non- $\alpha/\alpha$  ratio 0.68). The father (I-1) was a typical HPFH (Fig. 1b) with normal hematological indices and lower levels of HbA<sub>2</sub> (1.4%), which are in accordance with previously reported data [11]. The study of the Xmn I site was revealed positive (Fig. 1c), explaining in this manner the elevated G $\gamma$  levels (25%) found after the reversed phase HPLC separation, since it is already known that simple heterozygotes for the Greek type HPFH have essentially  $\Delta\gamma^I$  globin chains [9].

The mother (I-2) was a simple IVSII-745  $\beta$ -thalasse-



**Fig. 1.** (a) RSA I digestion of PCR product of the family members. A, control (nondigested of the mother's PCR); B, positive control of a homozygous for the IVSII-745 mutation; C, PCR product of the father; D, PCR product of the mother; E, PCR product of the son; F, PCR product of the daughter; m:  $\Phi$ X174 digested with EcoRI. (b) DGGE analysis of the PCR product of the  $\Lambda\gamma$  globin gene promoter. A, PCR of the mother; B, positive control of a simple heterozygote for the -117  $\Lambda\gamma$  HPFH; C, PCR of the father; D, PCR of the son; E, PCR of the daughter. (c) DGGE analysis of the PCR product of the  $G\gamma$  globin gene promoter. A, PCR of the son; B, PCR of the father; C, PCR of the son; D, PCR of the daughter; E, control of an individual with a T at -158  $G\gamma$  position.

mia heterozygote (Fig. 1a), with a C at -158 of the  $G\gamma$  promoter on both alleles and undetectable levels of HbF. The sister (II-2) was a simple IVSII-745 heterozygote with a T at -158 of the  $G\gamma$  promoter in one of the two alleles and 3.7% HbF. Genetic and molecular studies (Table II) showed that the -117 HPFH was linked to Hp I and the  $\beta^0$  IVSII-745 to Hp VII in all cases. IVSII-745 was linked with a C at -158 of the  $G\gamma$  promoter, so the double heterozygote for the Greek HPFH and the thalassemic allele was negative for the Xmn I restriction site; his haplotype analysis revealed: VII/I (+-----++/-+-----+-). When we examined 10 heterozygotes for the IVSII-745 mutation the  $\beta$ -thal chromosome was never found associated with the Xmn I cleavage site. The members of the family were examined also for the 4-bp deletion (-AGCA) at -225 to -222 of the  $\Lambda\gamma^T$  promoter, which strongly correlates with decreased  $\Lambda\gamma^T$  expression [19] and, as was expected, they were found negative since it has been reported that the 4-bp deletion is associated with haplotype II.

## DISCUSSION

HbF is the product of duplicated genetic loci. The  $G\gamma$  chain contains glycine at this position, while the  $\Lambda\gamma$  chain contains alanine. The  $\Lambda\gamma$  globin chain typically makes up approximately 30% of the  $\gamma$ -globin chains in newborns and approximately 60% in adults, and is therefore also involved in developmental switch [1]. It has been previously reported elevated HbF levels in compound heterozygous HPFH/ $\beta$ -thalassemia subjects [26-28]. The -117 (G→A)  $\Lambda\gamma$  HPFH mutation in Greeks is associated in vivo with 12-15% HbF levels in heterozygotes [5,6] and is linked to Hp I chromosome [5,29], whereas in Sardinians it is linked to Hp VII [11]. The same mutation was found in a Black family [40] associated with haplotype I, as occurs in Greeks. The -117 base change has been hypothesized to elevate  $\gamma$ -globin gene expression by decreasing binding of CP1 and CDP and increasing GATA-1 and NF-3 binding [30,31]. The -117  $\Lambda\gamma$  HPFH and the IVSII-745 chromosomes in our compound heterozygote have C at -158  $G\gamma$  (Xmn I negative) so that it can be excluded that the increase in  $G\gamma$  chain is due to the C→T substitution at -158. We do not know which of the two chromosomes is implicated in this increase in  $G\gamma$  synthesis. We think that it is more possible that the  $G\gamma$  gene in cis to the  $\Lambda\gamma$  HPFH is overexpressed by reason of the inhibitory effect of the  $\Lambda\gamma$  mutation, on the expression of the  $\delta$  and  $\beta$  globin genes, than an Xmn I negative  $G\gamma$  gene in cis to the IVSII-745-thal locus. Similar results were previously published, where the -175 mutation in the  $\Lambda\gamma$ -globin gene [34] is associated with a large increase of the expression of the adjacent  $G\gamma$  globin gene. On the other hand, the detected levels of HbF in the sister, who is a simple carrier of the mutated IVSII-745

determinant, could be attributed to the presence of the Xmn I site in trans with the  $\beta$ -thal mutation and probably to the presence of polymorphic sequences within the  $\beta$  globin gene cluster as mentioned before [32,33]. The  $-158\text{ C}\rightarrow\text{T}$  mutation has been associated with increased HbF only under conditions of erythropoietic stress [36], although it has been demonstrated to increase F-cell numbers in normal blood donors [37].

The haplotype IV found to be associated with the normal  $\beta$  gene in this family accounts only for the 0.9% of the total haplotypes identified in Greece [38] and has been correlated with high HbF levels, with high  $\text{G}\gamma$  values, and the  $-158\text{ G}\gamma\text{ C}\rightarrow\text{T}$  mutation in patients with  $\beta$ -thalassemia [39]. The decreased activity of  $\delta$  and  $\beta$  genes in cis to different ndHPFH [34] indicate a cis competition of the  $\gamma$ -globin gene cluster for the locus control region (LCR) 5' to the  $\varepsilon$ -globin gene. We observed a 16% reduction of the  $\delta$ -gene's expression and a much higher diminution of the  $\beta$ -gene's expression 40% in cis with the  $\text{A}\gamma$  mutation.

It has been recently demonstrated that in addition to the two factors (beta thalassemia and Xmn I-G gamma site) on chromosome 11p, there is a third major genetic determinant for fetal Hb production localized on chromosome 6q [35]. The molecular study of HPFH conditions in other families would provide us with useful data trying to understand the in vivo interaction of mutated  $\gamma$  and  $\beta$  genes with the fetal hemoglobin expression.

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